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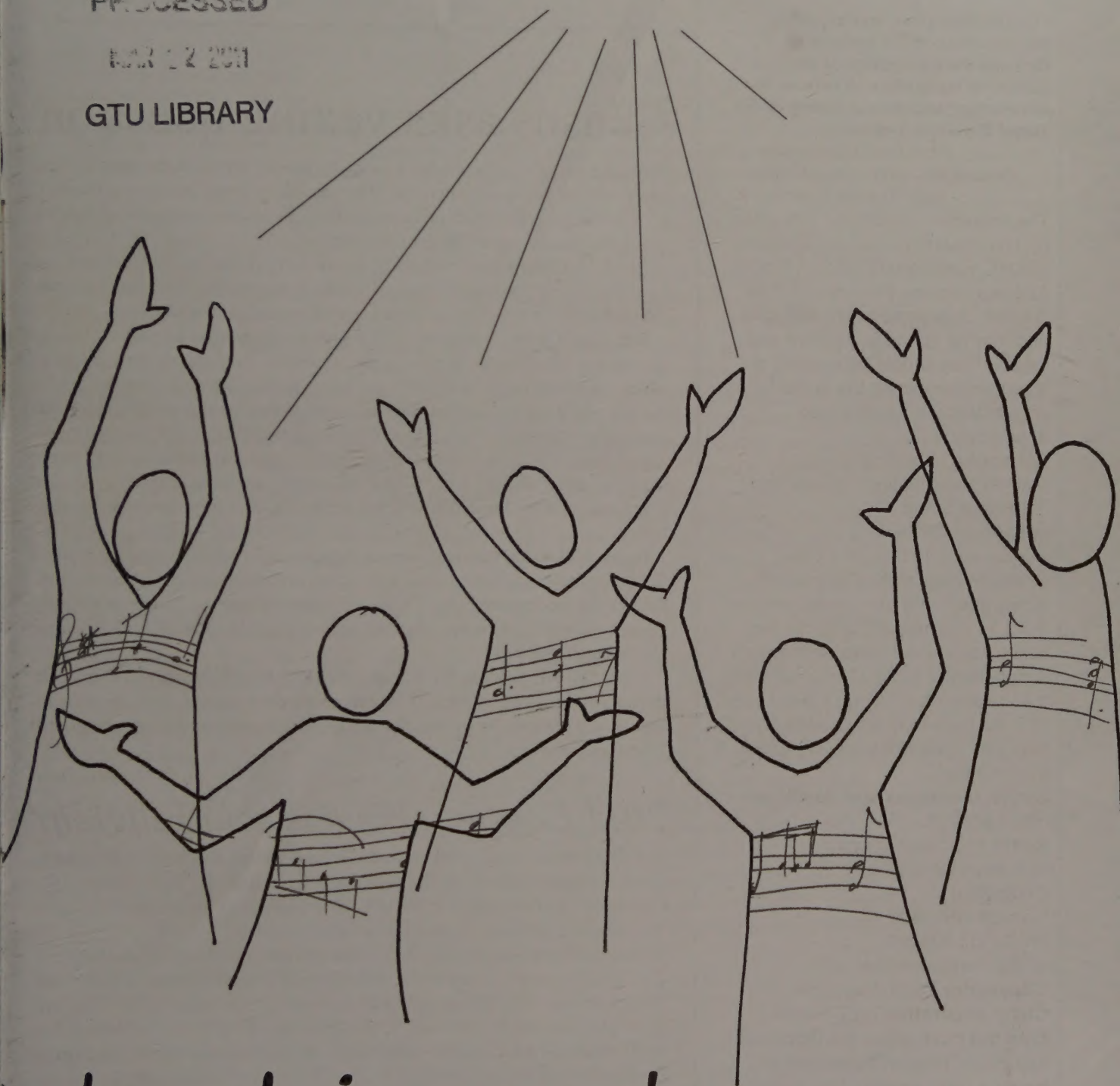
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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7766 19 March 2011

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*Worship and
intention*

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Inquiring Words

May the light we now kindle
Inspire us to use our powers
To heal and not to harm,
To help and not to hinder,
To bless and not to curse,
To uphold the Spirit of Freedom!

— Peter Teets

Editor's View

Census asks vexing question

When it comes to faith, we have some options in filling in the census form. Since it is not a required question, it is possible to leave the answer blank. If there is a faith path which is important to us in addition to Unitarianism, we could put that. Or, we could tick 'no religion'.

Derek McCauley, chief officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, is urging Unitarians to use the 'Unitarian' category (see below) so as to get an accurate count of members of our faith.

But, Alan Carter, a member of the Oxford congregation, doesn't plan to do that. He discovered that ticking the 'Unitarian' box creates an implication which he would rather not make. He wrote to the Office of National Statistics asking: 'I am a Unitarian. This is a faith with Christian origins, but it has changed a lot over the years, especially during the 20th century, and these days a great many Unitarians, including myself, consider themselves atheists rather than Christians. If I write in "Unitarian" under 'any other religion', will I be (very inaccurately) lumped in with Christians, or will I be counted as a generic 'other'?

Penny Wilkinson, customer service representative with the Census, replied: 'In general tables anyone person who writes in Unitarian in the religious question will be incorporated into 'Christian'. However because Unitarian has been given a separate processing code it will be possible to identify the number Unitarians if required.'

It is a difficult question for Unitarians who don't self identify as Christians. Because it would be a shame if Unitarians numbers turned out to be substantially lower because the Census chooses to draw its own conclusion about what Unitarians believe.

— MC Burns

2011 Census – What is your religion?

The first census forms were posted out on 7 March and will begin to drop through people's doors over the next few days. Census day is 27 March.

One of the questions is again; 'What is your religion'? You can use it to record your religion, or to specify that you have no religion.

This is a voluntary question as Parliament was concerned that a mandatory religion question would be seen as an infringement of respondents' civil liberties. We would respectfully urge all Unitarians and Free Christians to use 'Any other religion' and enter 'Unitarian' in the space provided. This is an abbreviation for 'Unitarian-Free Christian' provided on the list from the Census authorities. So whether you are a Unitarian or a Free Christian, or indeed both, in this context 'Unitarian' means all of us.

In the 2001 Census, 3604 Unitarians were recorded in England and 383 in Wales. There were another 30 Unitarian-Universalists in England and none in Wales. There were 167 Unitarians in Scotland and 3 Unitarian-other. The total was 4187.

This is your opportunity to ensure that as an accurate as possible count is taken of the number of Unitarians (in the interests of truth and to contribute to knowledge) and also to declare your allegiance.

— Derek McCauley, Chief Officer

Finding our place in the universe

Dear Lord, be good to me
the sea is so wide
and my boat is so small.

– Irish Fisherman's Prayer

By Helaina Checketts

At first sight, we worship that which is more powerful than we are. We worship angels and footballers and anyone who seems to have more power than we do. But there are deeper dimensions to this behaviour than mere adulation. We want to understand the universe, we want to feel part of it; we want to feel safe in it. Often, we want to say thank you for it, and for events and people that make our hearts glad. Sometimes, we throw ourselves on the mercy of higher powers. We ask for their intervention in our lives. All these things seem to be important things to the human spirit.

Worship. The word is derived from the Old English *worth-scipe*, word meaning *worthiness* or *worth-ship* – to give, at its simplest, worth to something.

In *Mysticism*, a book published in 1911, Evelyn Underhill says that worship is an act of religious devotion usually directed to one or more deities 'The adoring acknowledgment of all that lies beyond us, the glory that fills heaven and earth. It is the response that conscious beings make to their Creator, to the Eternal Reality from which they came forth; to God, however they may think of Him or recognize Him, and whether He be realized through religion, through nature, through history, through science, art, or human life and character.'

The Catholic church says that adoration is the form of worship and homage that is rightly offered to God alone. It is the acknowledgement of excellence and perfection of an uncreated, divine person. Veneration, known as *dulia* in classical theology, is the honour due to the excellence of a created person such as the saints, or the Virgin Mary.

Good old **Wikipedia.org** offers these methods of worship: Prayer, meditation, ritual, scripture, sacraments, sacrifice, sermons, chanting, music or devotional song, dance, religious holidays, festivals, pilgrimage, dining, fasting, temples or shrines, idols, or simply private individual acts of devotion.

I would add 'rejoicing' to that.

When I think about worship, the things that come to mind are connection, intention, perception.

It can be said that people connect with the spirit in many ways, through meditation and prayer, certainly, but through other more everyday activities that still the mind – such as dancing, knitting or cycling. I agree with this wholeheartedly, but I think that something only qualifies as worship when the connection is made with intention. When we meditate, we still the mind so that insight can come. We sit in a quiet place to aid the process, or we make ourselves quiet. Prayer has intention – to contact the divine. This is true, too, for those who contact the divine as part of a practice of spiritual healing, or other therapy.

Some worshipful acts ask for things. There we are, petitioning whoever or whatever is in control of the universe, stating our problems and asking for help. Then we give conditions for the kind of help we want, and suggest what we might do in exchange. This always seems a little bit strange, as we don't necessarily know what the universe would like. As the tiniest dot in such immensity, it seems odd that God –

the name I will use here – could possibly be interested in us. Although my gut feeling is that he or she has been and always will be. I also believe that she has no interest in reciprocal tit for tat and that being kind to one another is part of one's life growth path, rather than part of a deal.

Some worshipful acts are in gratitude for help received, or simply for having been born into the beauties and trials of this world. On a recent Spiritual Companionship course one of the questions we had to ask of ourselves was: Am I connecting with and experiencing the mystery and beauty of life? This connection has always been fundamental to my belief that there must be some form of divine power. As a child I made this connection more fully lying under a tree than I ever did in church. The beauty of the world we live on is something that often astounds us with its abundance – whether it be the vastness of the Grand Canyon or the hardness of bacteria that live in hot sulphur springs. We respond to this need by singing hymns and other forms of praising. It is a bit like congratulating God on his handiwork – nice one God, thank you. Gratitude for what we have is important and it is more important for us to offer it than for God to receive it. *God is complete, but we are still growing within her.*

Another form of worship is to simply wait and perceive what happens. There are several variants on this; one is to peer into eternity, hoping there is something there and that it will communicate. The most effective way is to empty the mind as far as possible, gently shunting thoughts out of the way – perhaps using chanting or other rituals to aid this – to centre and quiet ourselves and wait for God to come. We can use many ways to access God. So it often happens by accident, perhaps through music or appreciation of beauty. Many people do this naturally without associating it with religion. I know many knitters and tapestry workers who find stillness and peace in their work, and I heard a runner say on the radio that when he runs he feels fully himself, he knows who he is. Most people can find a sense of both who they are and of the greater cosmos – I think they are closely related things – when they listen or play music or dance to it. This is important but as the composer Gorecki said, 'It is what is between and behind the notes that is important.'

Sometimes whatever it is seems to come from the outside, sometimes we find that we have the whole universe within ourselves, and something reaches to us from there. People who tell us during episodes of mental illness that they are god or Jesus Christ are simply reflecting that aspect of reality. They have lost sight of their own fragile ego, but possibly they are touching on the god that is within all of us.

Who are we worshipping? Does it matter where that urge comes from?

Julian Jaynes, son of a Unitarian Minister, wrote in his book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* that the physiology of early humankind's brain evolution meant that – after the development of speech – we heard our right brains telling us what to do. As language grew, and we started to evolve concepts such as past and future and to see ourselves in this space-time context, consciousness evolved. Instead of being creatures of the moment who hear something in our heads telling us what to do next, we began to be fully conscious and to feel that we were the

(Continued on next page)

Worship is about intention, connection

(Continued from previous page)

ones thinking the thoughts. We lost the ability to hear our right brains telling us what to do, but we could hear ourselves thinking inside our heads.

Our brain hardware remained much the same, bar a little bit of evolution. But mainly, it was a software change. It's possible that being conscious was a cultural advantage, and most people caught on. However, it caused a great deal of unrest and fighting. People missed that time of surety, when the gods spoke to them, in their own heads. It was seen as a golden age, and some people, such as oracles, began to appear. People could ask questions of the gods once more. Jaynes does not say these people were channeling God. In fact, as conflicts grew, the voices were more aggressive and less pleasant. Over time, it was more difficult to get hold of the voices. Fewer people could hear them, and those who could often had to go into a trance or go through rituals. Jaynes felt that the Bible was a record of this transition from the God that people could hear in their heads to the exterior Judeo-Christian God – a God for conscious people.

I was shocked by this book. Although what Jaynes proposes is really only a fragment of evolutionary theory, he had devoted his whole life to thinking about it. I am not entirely sure that I buy it, but it is rather persuasive. For a while, it dislodged my faith in there being something out there and in me, until I realised that I had decided God had a consciousness like mine. How could I know that? I don't even know what God is. And with my consciousness, I can hardly organise my own house, let alone a cosmos. Silly me, I had made a model without enough clues, without acknowledging to myself that I had made it. Jocelyn Bell, an astrophysicist, rightly pointed out that theories and paradigms keep changing and that you can never have the complete answer in science or in religion.

I am sure that the voice of the right hemisphere is not the voice of God. There is something else out there, I feel, and its voice is more still, more silent. It is of a different nature. I don't really need – in the end – to know what is out there, just to have a suspicion that it exists.

Does it matter if God has gone or does not play an obviously active part in organising human affairs? In Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America*, God has gone, but heaven and earth are still functional. The Angels keep things going, following the traditions the almighty created. Despite their immense powers they are distressed and keen for God to come back. Even though God probably has every faith in them, they don't fully appreciate their own abilities. Perhaps they don't want the responsibility. Their human visitor Prior suggests they sue God for leaving them in a mess. Good point, but heaven is still glorious, still working, as is the planet Earth. What we do with heaven and Earth is up to them and us really. Criticising God for not being what we think she should be is a bit rude. I miss my parents, but I am not going to sue them for having died. I am grateful to have been born, and I am fortunate that what I do with my life is up to me. Perhaps God is working on another



Photo by Bob Pounder

project. Perhaps he is playing 'Secret Millionaire' on Earth as some Christians believe he has already. Or maybe God has merged back into all creation, to be the still, small voice once again.

It can be difficult to have a sense of that presence at one's shoulder, or do other than doubt it is more than a temporal lobe aberration. Some of us never have a sense of a personality that could be called 'god' at all, but they still, as William Bloom points out, have feelings of connection to something.

We can worship the fecund and various powers of nature I suppose, as I am sure Richard Dawkins does.

Perhaps that is what god is. Perhaps

that is all god needs to be. Although for me god has a consciousness of some immense incomprehensible kind, in which our little human consciousnesses are somehow enfolded. That happens to be the way my mind is wired up.

Gratitude is a difficult emotion. It does not work unless it is genuine. Thanking God for a beautiful day may be difficult if you are in deep trouble for some reason or other. It can be hard to thank a deity if you are unsure about his existence. But whether a specific God-consciousness exists, the universe has unwound from somewhere and is kind enough to continue unfolding, dark energy pushing it ever outwards.

Grace exists, perhaps enough for people to be optimistic, to see it as dominant over disaster. Something out there reaches towards us, and taps us on the shoulder. It's happened to me sitting at work. It has happened walking down the street. I suddenly have this sense of being part of transcendent reality that is real enough to know but impossible to describe. And that keeps me connecting through prayer, singing hymns, hoping to be aware, hoping to be granted another little glimpse of the greater reality.

Whatever we worship is too big and strange for us to see directly. Like the chaps on 'The Sky at Night' showing us how to practise safe sun observation, we use our rituals or practice of meditation to bring the divine into a focus we can deal with – so that we can catch some understanding of what is out there. What little we glimpse brings us into contact with that greater reality. We seem to have a need to understand that order and to understand how we belong to it.

As long as we don't confuse ritual, knitting or football or orderliness or even music, with the whole of what there is, or believe that the structure of the world will automatically follow our beliefs and wishes, it doesn't really matter how we connect. It doesn't matter whether it happens by accident or with intention. It is that connection that is important whether it is brief or whether we are so enlightened that we can grasp the whole of reality for the whole of every day. Worship, to me at this time, is the simple act of paying attention in a right way, of hearing that tiny voice that is bigger than all of us.

Helaina Checketts is a member of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich.



Helping Hands

This year the General Assembly is celebrating volunteers. Traditionally many Unitarians have worked in a voluntary capacity for the good of the wider society. They still do. In this series we shall focus on just a few of them who are demonstrating the social responsibility that is one of the threads of Unitarianism.

Sabrina Lewins helps a Headway client with a project.

Headway clients inspire volunteer

By Sabrina Lewins

When I retired from my job as director's secretary at The Open University, I wanted to do something useful in the community. A very dear friend, who had retired earlier and was volunteering at Headway, suggested that I make a visit to Headway House, to see if that might be of interest to me. Feeling a bit nervous about what it would be like and whether I would have anything to offer, I did obtain an interview, agreed to join the volunteer staff, and have been working there one day a week for the past 10 years.

Headway is a national charity which provides a wide range of help for people who have brain injuries. Headway in Cambridge is one of the centres which provides specialist day services for people with brain injuries and also supports their families. It is a place where people can meet others who have experienced similar problems in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, but it is much more than that. Service users are motivated to achieve goals and maximise their independence while enjoying a varied range of activities such as creative arts, a book group, drama, football, singing, making a podcast, writing, gardening, board games, cognitive work and so on. 'Next Steps' sessions help prepare service users for achieving more independence and teach such skills as shopping, cooking, and planning for their future. There is an excellent gym, staffed by qualified and very kind instructors who have done wonders in helping people improve their mobility and fitness.

Service users work in groups, with individual help from volunteers where appropriate, and that is where I come in. I can be an extra hand for those with the use of only one hand, or help with ideas for a podcast, playing GO or Scrabble, clearing up after coffee break, participating in a session on strategies for improving and understanding memory, aiding someone in using the internet, helping someone to take off their jacket or pushing a wheelchair – whatever needs doing! Engaging in conversation, especially with people who have speech difficulties, can also be very important in helping people with their communication skills and re-learning to socialise.

Why do I continue volunteering at Headway House? Apart from giving meaningful structure to my week, I am always inspired by the wonderful courage shown by service users in the way they adapt to their changed lifestyles. There is a really uplifting atmosphere with people being very sensitive to each other's needs and always ready to help one another. It is also exciting to watch many service users continue to improve markedly in mobility, social skills and even memory – it just takes time and practise. As a small contributor to the work at Headway Cambridgeshire, I feel deeply grateful to be a part of such a worthwhile endeavour.

For more information: www.headway-cambs.org.uk

*Sabrina Lewins is a member of Memorial Church,
(Unitarian) Cambridge.*

Motion supports compassion

By Feergus O'Connor

'Always treat others as you yourself wish to be treated'. Was it not this ethic of the Golden Rule which inspired such diverse spiritual teachers as Confucius, Rabbi Hillel, Francis of Assisi and William Ellery Channing and such dedicated humanitarians as William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury, Florence Nightingale, Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer and Margaret Barr?

It is this noble ethic which inspired the monk Rahere in 1123 to found my local hospital, Barts, as a refuge for the sick and poor, as it did our Post-War Government (in which two Unitarian Cabinet Ministers sat) to institute our precious National Health Service. It continues to inspire what is most valuable in our Welfare State, with its ideal of care for all in need regardless of wealth or social status.

When asked which of his teachings his followers should 'practise all day and every day', Confucius replied 'Shu', translated as 'reciprocity' or empathic concern for others. When Rabbi Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus, was interrogated by an inquirer on the essentials of his religious faith, he answered: 'What is hateful to you, do not do to others. That is the whole of the Law; the remainder is merely commentary.'

The wisdom of this spiritual ideal is asserted in all the world's great religions and by wise teachers throughout the ages. It is this fundamental principle which inspires the Charter for Compassion, supported by the Dalai Lama, Bishop Desmond Tutu and other people of goodwill the world over. It has been affirmed by, among many others, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the International Association for Religious Freedom, Religions for Peace, the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions and the Three Faiths Forum.

It is my hope that we Unitarians in Britain and Ireland will read, reflect upon and embrace the Charter in our minds and hearts and so join with people of goodwill all over the globe who have already pledged their support to it. May we, each in our own way, strive to live it out in word and deed.

The Charter for Compassion affirms that spirit of universal benevolence which can alone save the world from aggressive violence and ensure a common and happy future for all people worldwide. It is an act of faith in ourselves, our potential for goodness and loving kindness and in our common future together. It may serve to inspire us in our concern for social justice in this country, in our actions for penal reform and, looking beyond our shores, in our practical actions to aid the poor of the Third World and in our hopes and strivings for global justice and universal peace.

May each of us pledge ourselves to help realise that yearned-for future by doing all we can to build that ideal human commonwealth, which alone can bring about the happiness and wellbeing of all, each of us and all God's creatures on Earth.

The Rev Feergus O'Connor is minister at Golders Green.

Motion proposed for the 2011 GA Annual Meetings

As of 9 March, the motion had 34 signatories, consisting of ministers and ministry students.

A version of the motion which meets General Assembly criteria was prepared by the Rev Andrew Hill.

This General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

1) joins with the Unitarian Universalist Association, the

International Association for Religious Freedom, the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Religions for Peace, the Council for a Parliament of the World Religions, the National Council of Churches USA, the Three Faiths Forum, the Earth Charter and other people of goodwill from various spiritual traditions throughout the world in affirming the Charter for Compassion

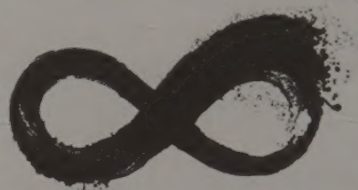
2) urges our fellow Unitarians and Universalists to reflect on the Charter's vital humanitarian message, inspired by the Golden Rule, and to act in its spirit.

3) resolves to become "a partner organisation [to the Charter for Compassion]."

Proposer: the Rev Feergus O'Connor, seconded by the Rev Dr Richard Boeke.

For more information on the Charter for Compassion see: <http://charterforcompassion.org>

If you would like to lend your support to the motion, please email Feergus O'Connor on: Ggunirev@aol.com



Charter for Compassion

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect. It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others – even our enemies – is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion. We therefore call upon all men and women – to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion – to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate – to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures – to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity – to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings, even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarised world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

Unitarians in Christchurch need support

The post-earthquake dispatch from Derek McCullough, minister with Christchurch New Zealand Unitarian Universalists, was understated: 'Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond my control, the March UU newsletter will be late.'

While the congregation is thankful none of the members of the church were killed or injured, some – including Derek have lost their homes.

An email from Derek and Rebekah McCullough sent on 27 February – 6 days after the 6.3 magnitude quake – described their experience: 'It has been a harrowing ordeal but we are counting ourselves as extremely lucky. There are still many people missing and sadly so many casualties that it forces one to try to keep perspective. Not always an easy task.'

'Derek and Marion were very lucky as Derek had been working at the computer in the living room only a few moments before the quake. He went into the kitchen to make Marion a cup of tea and was able to grab her from her seat by the window and pull her under the table just before the windows shattered and her chair was covered in glass and debris. The dining room wall is now in our neighbours' front yard.

'Mom and Dad were having a wee nap and were abruptly woken to their drawers and all and sundry being thrown on top of them. Their granny flat, luckily, fared quite well and although many, many breakages we have been able to salvage most of their furniture and possessions. Our house did not do so well and will have to be demolished.

We cannot really safely go into the house so we have only been able to retrieve either things that are necessary (if we can find them) or sentimental. Really not much at all but in the end



Rebekah and Derek McCullough left a sign to let rescue workers know they got out alive. Photo below, the livingroom which Derek walked out of just before the quake.

they are only things.

People have been fabulous, generous and so helpful. There is a wonderful community spirit that transcends the tragedy and keeps us all looking forward.

We were able to stay at Derek's sister's holiday home in Castle Hill for a few days where we did the 3 hour commute each day into the city to do whatever we could do and then could retreat to her peaceful home each evening with hot water, flushing loo and electricity. We are now staying at another relatives' home in Lincoln. She has moved out of her place so the five of us (Derek and I and his mum and my folks) can be together. It is a beautiful home with everything working and we are so appreciative. We have had several offers of short/long term rentals - again overwhelmed by peoples' response to our 'homeless' situation. We will be renting a place two-doors from Derek's sister, Mary, which will put us close to her and her family. We can't move there for some weeks yet but that's okay, our current 'home' is a great spot that feels safe.

... We are still finding things to laugh about and we continue to play our ukuleles. Caleb, Dad and I had a great session tonight.' The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists set up a web page where Unitarians can make donations to support the congregation: <http://www.causes.com/causes/583046> Or cheques can be sent to ICUU Treasurer the Rev David Shaw, Meadow Hey, Adlington Lane, Grindleford, Hope Valley, Derbyshire S32 2HT. Please note that they are for the New Zealand appeal.

Brighton church burgled, ransacked

Members of Brighton Unitarian church arrived at the church on Sunday 13 February to find that it had been broken-into and ransacked. Although no lasting damage was done, windows were smashed and the vestry had been trashed. Lay leader Jef Jones said 'I am particularly grateful to our member Ann Woodhead who arrived to set up and found a terrible mess. It must have been very upsetting. Ann called the police and was told not to touch anything. So when she had done everything that needed to be done Ann sat and meditated for a while.

'I'm sure this made a difference and helped to maintain the sanctity and serenity of our church. We were able to go ahead and hold our Sunday service as usual - only with some parts of the church cordoned off until the police forensics team arrived.

I'm very grateful to everyone who helped us get through that day – people really pulled together. More than anything I think the break-in has reminded us how much we cherish our calm and elegant church.

'At our service on Sunday 27 February we lit a candle for all the generations of Unitarians who have helped maintain our sacred space, followed by a candle for all our current volunteers. We also lit a candle for other victims of crime in Brighton. That weekend there was a murder, two sexual assaults and one violent assault. Finally we lit a candle for whoever it was who broke into our church; a candle of hope that they may find wholeness and maybe one day belong to a community like ours which means so much to us all.'

Good lives out of harsh materials

By Penny Johnson

Divine Discontent is a collection of 25 prayers by the Rev Dr Harry Lismer Short, collected and collated by the Rev Frank Walker, and beautifully produced by Sebastien Castello Press

Harry Lismer Short came from a dynasty of Unitarian ministers. Both his father and father-in-law were Unitarian ministers, as were his brothers, Basil and Graham, and nephew Peter. He was a historian, philosopher, scholar, writer, minister at Rochdale and Macclesfield and librarian, tutor and Principal of Manchester College Oxford.

He poured into his prayers his religious faith, his certainties and uncertainties, doubts and anxieties, and his strong sense of responsibility and commitment to those who are close at hand and those who live at the other ends of the earth.

As a student of his I valued his sense of justice and understanding, being on more than one occasion grateful for his wise and gentle handling of problems, with his sense of humour and merry wit. He did not expect everything to run smoothly, and these prayers acknowledge that life so often lurches from crisis to crisis, and that the stresses and strains of life can be met with the assurance that the spiritual life within us upholds and supports us.

Such phrases as these point to the contemporary nature of these prayers:

‘To understand is to forgive.’

‘It is our task, not to mould others into our likeness, but to find ways of fellowship and mutual understanding.’

‘Out of the loose ends of life we must make a coherent plan of living.’

‘We acknowledge the problems which weigh heavily on our lives, and pray for wisdom, justice and kindness to deal with them.’

‘The world needs our discontent and our struggle.’

Although written prior to 1975 when he died, they are as relevant today as they were then, for, like him, we still experience conflict, human dilemmas, and need light to see things in proportion.

The themes of the prayers range from personal aloneness, turmoil, struggle, privacy and openness to the need for companionship on the road of life (a crowded highway). They call for honest objectivity in our judgments of others, and our hopes that we shall encourage, not hinder, and that we can weather the storms of life together.

Beauty, joy and wonder, talents, and gratitude for simple and homely pleasures are all featured – as are prayers for commitment to ministry, the induction of a minister and prayers for Palm Sunday, Easter Day, Advent, the last Sunday in the year, and summer, autumn and harvest.

In reading this selection of prayers, we are presented with a philosophy for living. As Frank Walker says in his introduction, ‘Sadly many of the manuscripts of his sermons have been lost, which is why it is so important to preserve these deeply-felt prayers, simply and beautifully written, as the honest expressions of a man of rare goodness and integrity.’

I am sure that we should be grateful to Frank Walker for making this resource available, and I commend *Divine Discontent* to you as a most useful and welcome aid to those ‘struggling to make good lives out of harsh materials’.

The Rev Penny Johnson is a retired Unitarian minister.



For Honest Objectivity from *Divine Discontent*

Oh God, we know that we belong in a world of great variety. There are many kinds of people, with many differences from one another. There is endless variety of circumstances, a complex of ever-changing events with which we have to cope. We know that we cannot fit people or things into neat patterns of comprehension, so that we have understood them fully and can use them for our own ends. People and things insist on being themselves, and we must take account of their actuality. We must work and live with them, and not just mould them to suit ourselves. We pray for an honest objectivity in our judgments of the world. ‘Things are what they are and will be what they will be’; why should we wish to be deceived? This is the world with which we have to do, and not some ideal world of our own imagining. We are not the centre of the world; it goes on without our directing. We can only hope to be in tune with what is best and most creative in it, and to live nearer to the ideal in that part of it which comes within our control. We pray for an honest objectivity in our judgments of people. They are not copies of ourselves, but insist on living their lives in their own way. The things we take for granted, they may question; the settled ways of moral life which we think unshakable, they may see differently. It is our task, not to mould others into our own likeness, but to find ways of fellowship and mutual understanding.

This is so, both with those who are near to us and those who are far away. With all men and women we must seek ways of mutual respect and understanding and love. The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. So we would live with honesty and friendship, according to truth and love, in this complex, rich, anxious, challenging world.

– The Rev Harry Lismer Short

Divine Discontent is available for £3, including postage, from Frank Walker, 130 New Road, Haslingfield, Cambridge CB 23 1LP.

Get to grips with banks' morality

The Unitarian Faith and Public Issues Commission is supporting a debate at St Paul's Institute on the Robin Hood tax. Here, the director of the institute says too many of us have not been outraged *enough* at the bankers' excesses.

By Giles Fraser

'The corporate tax affairs of an organisation like Barclays are complex, and not reducible to simplistic comparisons,' Barclays said. But it is not all that complex. Barclays has paid just 2.4 percent corporation tax on its 2009 profit of £4.6 billion.

Many people are justifiably outraged, not least because it seems that we have been round this one time and again, and nothing seems to change. After the credit crunch, the Archbishop of Canterbury challenged those working in banking 'to stop and wonder whether this might be a moment of enormous and strange opportunity'. It was an opportunity not taken. But perhaps most of us have not been outraged enough; or, rather, we have expressed a generalised sort of outrage, without ever having tried to fathom out the details of what has been going on.

For a year or so now, I have been running St Paul's Institute, an educational think tank that seeks to bring Christian ethics to

Attend the debate

St Paul's Institute, CAFOD, Tearfund and The Salvation Army have come together to host a panel debate in St Paul's cathedral on Tuesday 29 March at 7 pm. The debate will focus on the extent to which the financial sector has a moral role to play in contributing to the common good.

Public discussion on this topic has been stirred by the Robin Hood Tax campaign, which proposes an additional tax on the financial sector to raise billions of pounds that could be used to fight poverty and climate change both here and abroad. The Robin Hood Tax has been endorsed by the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

Evan Davis, well known economist and BBC presenter, will chair the debate which consists of panellists from different perspectives including:

Ken Costa, Chairman of Lazard International
Michael Izza, CEO of the Institute of Chartered Accountants

Rt Rev Peter Selby, Former Bishop of Worcester
Baroness Shirley Williams, House of Lords
This is a **free**, non-ticketed event and entry is through the front steps of St Paul's Cathedral.

Doors open at 6.15pm for a 7pm start.

Any enquiries contact institute@stpaulscathedral.org.uk or phone 020 7489 1011.



Robin Hood tax campaigners took their message to the Treasury. Robin Hood Tax campaign photo.

bear on questions of finance and economics. Given how much of the Bible is concerned with the right use of money, and the huge social impact that banks have on the way we live, one would have thought that churches would make the ethics of finance a high priority. But my experience is that, often, they do not. Yes, the world of the City can be difficult to understand, and it may seem like a closed shop. Many issues are, as Barclays suggests, 'complex'. But we must not be intimidated or put off by this. There are ways for the non-specialist to grapple with the issues. Last month, the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) published a report, <http://www.eccr.org.uk/module-htmlpages-display-pid-86.html> or <http://bit.ly/fs4Eq9>

It is a great resource for churches to get people thinking about the moral issues involved, including clear explanations of the slippery line between clever tax-avoidance and illegal tax-evasion, and of how banks set up 'complex circular transactions with little or no economic value'. Note that word 'complex' again. Complexity, of course, is the way some organisations mask what they are doing, throwing up a smoke-screen, so that ordinary people get baffled and walk away. We must not allow ourselves to be fooled. In December 2009, the Government set up a voluntary Code of Practice on Taxation for Banks, in which those who sign up – and Barclays has signed up – commit themselves to greater transparency and to reject the exploitation of tax loopholes. It is up to us to hold the banks to their best intentions. And we can properly do this only when we develop a greater literacy in the ways of the banking world. The ECCR report is a good place to start.

The Rev Dr Giles Fraser is Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral. He is also director of the St Paul's Institute, and responsible for the Cathedral's engagement with the City of London as a financial centre.

For more information on the Robin Hood Tax see: <http://robinhoodtax.org/>

Letters to the Editor

'Go in peace and live as free people'

To the Editor:

In *The Inquirer* of 30 October, Stephen Lingwood wrote in praise of the Greenbelt Festival: '...there are things that we Unitarians could learn... Greenbelt is justice-centred and politically engaged... This is a place for political action.' In acknowledgment of Greenbelt's commitment to give 'a greater emphasis to the plight of the Palestinian people', he reminded us that 'Israel-Palestine remains the pressing issue of our time.'

Chris Wilson, writing on matters of perhaps lesser moment but closer to home, in the 22 January *Inquirer*, calls on us to carry a torch for social justice and offers constructive proposals for aligning public policy with our moral compass and sense of social obligation. Yet, as our government continues to organise the murder of people in Afghanistan, continues to collude with Israel's murder and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, continues to enhance the efficiency of mechanisms to dispossess the poor and powerless in favour of the rich and powerful – both at home and abroad – and the corporate mainstream media manipulates the public mood to overlook the corruption of our political institutions and processes under the combined pressures of resurgent fascism and corporate greed while the imminence of irreversible climate change is manifestly ignored by all policy-makers, Robert Ince (*Inquirer*, 19 February) would have us believe that overt membership of the 'Unitarian and Free Christian Community' should preclude us from offering political opinions.

Gavin Lloyd, one of our visiting preachers at Shrewsbury, always closes his services with the benediction, 'Go in peace and live as free people'. Now that's the kind of Unitarianism we aspire to!

Alan Goater and Miriam Walton
Shrewsbury

Keeping a foot in the door of free inquiry

To the Editor:

How apposite that Carol Palfrey (*Inquirer*, 8 January) discovered her Unitarian identity at the beautiful Octagon Chapel in Norwich.

I recall that this was the spiritual home for many years of the celebrated author Ralph Hale Mottram. He sprang to fame with the 'Spanish Farm' trilogy (1924) for which he was awarded the Hawthornden prize and wrote some forty-one books in all. He always wrote compellingly of his native Norwich and relaxed by sitting on a bench on Mousehold Heath, overlooking his beloved city. He served as a magistrate and Lord Mayor and was a freeman of the city.

He further wrote 'When I proclaim myself a Unitarian, many good people, shift uneasily a little further away. Simplicity and un-exclusiveness are the sort of approach to God which I seek. Whatever its faults, it does at least keep its foot in the door which might otherwise be closed on free inquiry.'

Michael Garrard
Croydon

Baptists stress destination, Unitarians, the journey

I was intrigued, though not convinced, by reading Sue Woolley's account of her experience of a Baptist church and Daniel Costley's of a Romanian Orthodox cathedral. Near the end of Daniel's account he wrote of his need of 'reconnection with the unwritten Unitarian communion of coffee and cake'. This for me catches at the difference between Unitarianism and either of the other two. As Bill Darlison wrote not so long ago, our congregations are primarily about community. At their best they are communities because they recognise that they are on a journey together, unlike either of the other two which each in its own way celebrates the certainty of arrival. This is epitomised for me by the impertinent question one is sometimes asked by an evangelical Christian: 'Brother, are you saved?' Yes, I agree that many of our services could do with more enrichment and participation by the congregation and that making space for emotional involvement is a welcome development in our movement in recent years. But, at heart, we remain a community of travellers guided essentially by rationality rather than emotion. In our coffee and cake ritual at the end of the service newcomers and well-loved friends alike are made to feel welcome

and included as fellow travellers pausing for refreshment.

I have long been of the same mind as RL Stevenson: 'It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive'. We are each of us on an individual journey, and coming together for worship and for coffee and cake afterwards can help us to remain hopeful too.

Richard Lovis
Plymouth Unitarian Church

All four zoas are essential

To the Editor:

I was interested to see William Blake's Newton on the front cover of the 8 January issue of *The Inquirer*. As Clifford M Reed noted in the article 'Building Jerusalem' the picture is highly critical of its subject. It may interest Unitarians, with one of our roots in the Enlightenment, that it represents Blake's fervent opposition to both Empiricism and Rationalism: he wrote of Reason and the five senses and Newton's sleep, a state in which vision was restricted to the material world. He was mildly critical of Unitarian minister and fellow radical, Joseph Priestley, lampooning him as Doctor Inflammable Gas. I have met Unitarians who, perhaps because of their commitment to rationality, seem suspicious of Blake with his vision of angels.

When Blake produced Newton, he was convinced that the imagination was the only faculty in human beings that could perceive the eternal world. He had also believed that emotion, which he then called energy, was essential for artistic creation and for the transformation of society he still saw in the French Revolution. However, by the time he wrote his final epic *Jerusalem*, he realised that reason and the senses, as well as imagination and emotion would all be integrated into the whole, redeemed human being.

There seems to be a split between reason and emotion in the polarisation between religious fundamentalism and intolerant atheism today. Also, in the Unitarian movement there seem to be pockets of hidebound rationalists which visionaries are beginning to encroach upon. We need to realise that we need all four zoas to be full and spiritual human beings.

Brinley Price
York

Commentary

EDL is missing out on heaven

By Gordon Jackson

I have something to say about ... the English Defence League (EDL), Luton and heaven.

Sometimes I think I must write about that something that provokes me but I don't get to it, other times that something gets to me at a level that usually means I will have to write about it to get it out of me and into the air. If the world is a collective Quaker meeting, this is my moment to share.

I have not a lot of time so hopefully what should be said is said though ideas may have to be followed up.

I was in Luton town centre on the day that the soldiers paraded through the town. I did not see the parade but I did witness the standoff that occurred following it when the Police moved in 'to protect' the demonstrators from Troops supporters.

There had been murmuring previously in Luton though that day was going to act significantly in the history of the EDL. Within weeks its genesis had occurred, within months it was protesting.

Like many things, I am interested in what lies behind it. Luton is a multi-cultural town with a population which is 70 % white and 30 % black if we speak in simplistic black and white terms. It is my observations that there is a perception amongst a percentage of white people that they are being left behind, that they have no identity, that they have little to hold onto whilst it seems other cultures thrive and are rich in cultural terms.

Support of the town football team perhaps gives one place for white youth to identify themselves. Supporters come from different sections of the community though from what I know, which may not be much, it is predominantly white. Curiously, it seems that it was from the local football firm that EDL was formed and seems to have replicated itself across England.

It seems that the new target was closer to home than other rival football firms, that being the local Muslim community. Yes the posters that were displayed shocked people but there were no more than twelve demonstrators. For those who aligned

themselves later to EDL it was enough. They had enough of feeling that Muslims were dictating what happened or not in the town. In my view what lies beneath this is a struggle for sections of the white community to accept that the balance of power has changed and is changing.

I understand this to a degree as I witnessed something similar in Northern Ireland. It is not easy for those who have enjoyed power and perhaps privilege to accept that others want to share that space. I think it is particularly difficult for those who may be the least well off and as a consequence have less control of where they live. They are probably the ones who will immediately have to share the space and the resources be they Council houses, schools and so forth.

EDL, I think for the moment provide a refuge that makes them feel a bit powerful again though fear and violence is the means of achieving that power.

I have another vision for Luton. I use Luton Central library regularly and one day as I sat amongst the newspapers, I noticed a tour going on. The people on the tour were from many nationalities and seemed to be having an introduction to the library. My mind thought of heaven. I thought this might be what heaven is like. I sat amongst the regulars who knew the place well, we were from all over the world and here were some new arrivals being inducted.

A bit of a dreamy description but my point as you may have guessed is that when we all wake up in that place called heaven, every tribe, tongue, race, will be there and we will be brothers and sisters not whites or blacks.

I accept there are challenges and I am not immune from them but ultimately we have to see beyond this illusion of race, religion and see our own flesh and blood.

For those who don't believe in heaven we can still build it whilst we live...

Gordon Jackson is a member of Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Church.

Congregation leaves 'timewarp' behind

Glasgow Unitarians have new meeting room

It must be about two-and-a-half years since our Management Committee woke to the realisation that we must bring our premises and our practices into the 21st Century or face closure through being stuck in a 1960s time-warp.

Chuck McProud came up with the excellent idea of moving the church down to the basement so that we could develop the rest of the building as let-able space. His vision was a very plain room, conducive to quiet contemplation, complete with tea-making facilities.

Then member Charlie Dand, developed the plan that is now taking shape. As an architect, he knows all the regulations that apply to spaces for public assembly and for offices, which our alterations must satisfy.

We considered having the works done by a single contractor, but soon realised this would be beyond our means. So a volun-

teer Property Team has overseen every aspect of the work so far. We are fortunate to have someone as dedicated and practical as Chuck, who has been in the building most days since work started, facilitating all the tradesmen, and planning the next moves. In spite of a power of other work, Treasurer Ruth Gregory and husband Bill have taken a keen and practical interest in the work as it unfolded.

Through all the disruption, George Paxton has managed to juggle and keep the groups happy to meet here, and so hold onto our income stream.

However, there is still much to be done. Alastair Moodie is looking into how best to market the new offices upstairs. Our appreciation and thanks go to all who have worked so hard to make this dream a reality for our fellowship.

— From Glasgow Unitarians News & Views.

News in brief

Shrewsbury serves 'Amnestea'



Bronwen Taylor, Alan Goater, Miriam Walton, Sue Davies and Dorothy Haughton

Shrewsbury Unitarian Church boasts a memorial to Charles Darwin, celebrating the fact that he worshipped there with his mother. We, the congregation, wanted to open the church on 12 February, Darwin's birthday and decided that the best way to do that would be to hold an 'Amnestea' and celebrate 50 years of Amnesty at the same time.

We were interviewed on Radio Shropshire and had our pictures taken for the *Shropshire Star* and the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*. Some people came in just to see the memorial but many also drank tea and ate cake. We had also put out copies of the *Amnesty Candle* poem by the Rev Arthur Vallance with a note inviting people to light one of the candles on the communion table in remembrance of the many prisoners of conscience. We made £92.20 and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

— Dorothy Haughton

Amnesty Candle

By Arthur Vallance

We light this flame in sympathy with those
Detained by prison walls or wire coils,
Who spoke a word for freedom, and exposed
The narrow fear that fetters human minds
And keeps men speechless. May our prayers arise
While this flame burns, to speed release for all
Who lie in bondage through their love of truth.

Cross Street members walk for respite

Alan Myerscough and Wynne Simister from Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, will be walking the 102 miles of the Cotswold Way with their dogs, camping along the route. They will be starting at Chipping Campden and finishing at Bath. They hope to raise funds for Tyddyn Bach Trust in Penmaen-mawr North Wales.

Cross Street has supported Tyddyn Bach Trust for many years. Tyddyn Bach was and is the only respite centre for HIV/Aids in England and Wales and is now widening its scope to cater for all those needing respite.

They have a wish list which includes indoor and outdoor games equipment for their children's play area, improvements to the disabled car parking space and a very necessary people carrier. It is Alan and Wynne's hope that they will be able to raise at least some of the money needed for the charity's projects.

Anyone wishing to make a donation can do so through Tyddyn Bach's website www.tyddynbachtrust.org.uk where there is also an account of the walk.

Stratford church thrives and grows

We are now coming to the end of the first three years in our new church. Looking back, we have had some highs and lows, but through it all we thank our Lay Person in Charge Julian Meek who worked so hard to keep the congregation going while we were in transition and then taking us through our first years.

We now have a growing church. Our numbers are increasing, in fact, our church is alive. On Tuesdays we have a coffee morning and there is a mid-week service on Wednesday. The church is open daily and people are welcome to come in for a quiet chat. Some need spiritual refreshment, or want to find out more about the Unitarian and Free Christian ethos. Julian is always there to help in any circumstance.

We are now more than a church. We are seen as a cultural centre, promoting diversity and inclusiveness which stands us in good stead for the future – especially towards 2012.

— Olive Moffatt



The Spring edition of the Unitarian Christian Association journal, *The Herald*, is out!

Key features include:

- **What future for our Ministry?** – special focus on ministry with: Linda Phillips, Alex Bradley, Ant Howe, Daniel Costley, Jean Bradley and Paul Travis.
- **Our Chief Officer discovers that Unitarians are founder members of Christian Aid.** Derek McAuley considers the implications – are we making enough of this link?

Special promotional offer price for this edition: only £2.50 (including postage), ORDER YOU COPY NOW from: Cathy Fozard, 20 Handforth Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 2LU.

Email: cathy@fozard.com

What others think of our journal: "I really enjoy reading *The Herald* – the variety of its content is excellent." – **Sue Woolley**, District Facilitator, Midland Unitarian Association, and Ministry student at Harris Manchester College, Oxford.